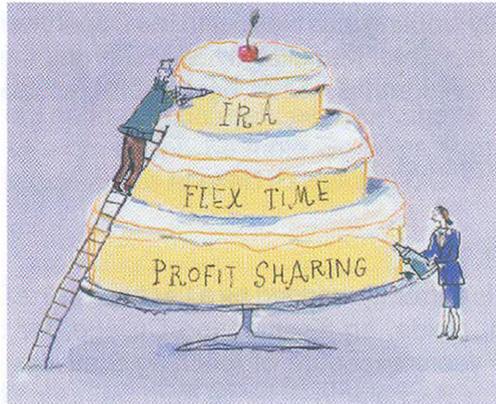


Issues In



Compensating The Modern Workforce

ABSTRACT

The establishment of fair wages and compensation relative to employers and employees has been a topic of debate since the beginning of our wage economy. Moral and economic factors have played important roles in wage setting considerations with the state, church and business organizations playing various roles along the way. We have progressed from a subsistence system under the "just wage" and "sustainable wage" doctrines of the middle ages through the piece-rate and job-based wage plans of the industrial and post-industrial revolution periods where extrinsic elements formed the centerpiece of employee compensation. In the new workplace, characterized by culturally diverse and high technology imperatives, appropriate compensation requires more than a take home paycheck and traditional fringe benefits. Intrinsic factors that appeal to employees' dignity, desire for autonomy, recognition, professional growth and opportunities for advancement must become a part of the compensation mix. This paper examines the goals and results of the traditional methods of compensation, and synthesizes proposals proffered in the literature for making compensation systems more relevant in attracting and retaining the desired pool of talents and skills for effective performance in the modern diversified and high technology workplace.



INTRODUCTION

What constitutes an appropriate level of compensation for the laboring class has been a topic of discussion since the dawn of our wage economy. From the feudal era, when manorial farm workers exchanged their labor for physical protection and subsistence share of the crops, to the manufacturing economy of the industrial revolution, and the current era of information technology, the question has remained flexible and subject to contemporary imperatives of employer/employee relationships. Intervening and moderating forces have, over the years, shaped the debates

on what the "propertied" class should pay the laboring class. The Catholic Church, through Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, (1891), weighed in with the "just wage" doctrine which proposed that "each worker, as head of household, had a right to a wage sufficient to maintain himself, his wife and children in reasonable comfort." (Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891 p. 63). Acknowledging that any wage system must be adapted to the realities of the marketplace, Pope Pius XI modified the just wage doctrine to reflect a balance in the needs and responsibilities of employers and employees in establishing

an appropriate wage system. The resulting "living wage" versus "sustainable wage" proposition requires compliance with two complementary principles: A living wage which must provide the worker an income sufficient to support himself and his family, and a sustainable wage which should allow the firm to stay in business (Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931 p. 57). Current minimum wage and welfare benefits legislations are attempts to bridge the gaps created when the sustainable wage that an employer can afford to pay falls short of the living wage the household head needs to support his family. And the debate goes on.

As we navigate through the cusp of the new millennium, corporations continue their rapid computerization and global reach within a dynamic economic environment manned by culturally diversified and high-technology workforce. An appropriate mix of reward components necessary and sufficient to satisfy and motivate this workforce is essential for the effectiveness, efficiency and competitiveness of business organizations. As more and more companies push to expand beyond local boundaries, it's important to understand and appreciate the vast cultural diversities involved, and the specialized compensation strategies needed to accommodate unique work groups. This paper, through an integrative literature review, synthesizes existing body of compensation paradigms and suggests choices and applications appropriate to the high-tech workforce within a culturally-diverse environment.

FUNCTIONS OF A REWARD SYSTEM



In the wake of the industrial revolution, one of the primary concerns in wage setting was how to rectify the impoverished plight of

and "flagrant injustices suffered by wage laborers: very meager income, serious lack of protection, job insecurity, etc." (Javier Hervada 12). This was partially a result of a prevailing attitude that subjected work to the law of supply and demand and to a bargaining process between business owners and workers who did not bargain on equal footing. Subsequent remedial proposal suggested that on a macro level, a moral function of wages should include a just and fair distribution of a firm's profits between capital and labor (Pius XI, QA 53-58), where "just and fair" is defined as "such remuneration [that] can be given either through what is called a family wage that is, a single salary given to the head of the family for his work, sufficient for the needs of the family without the other spouse having to take up gainful employment outside the home or through other social measures such as family allowances or grants to mothers devoting themselves exclusively to their families." (Pope John-Paul II, 1981, *Laborem Exercens*, p. 90).

Apart from and, perhaps, in addition to the theological and moral imperatives, businesses have used and continue to use wages to attain various economic and competitive objectives. At the turn of the twentieth century, Frederick Taylor proposed a piece rate compensation plan in which a worker's pay was based on units produced. Rudimentary and simplistic in nature, this scheme was revolutionary in changing the scope of rewards and acting as a catalyst for future modifications in the industrial sector. Although the shape and form of reward systems have varied over the years, three basic objectives remain common: to attract a qualified workforce, to retain good employees and to motivate workers toward higher productivity and job satisfaction.

First, in order for an organization to operate and remain competitive, it must have a capable workforce. Whenever there is a demand for a

particular type of skill or tra competition will determine v receives the more competent work and who does not. The reward pack has been a potent tool in attractir superior pool of applicants. Seco as automation and comput continue to be dominant a pervasive in industrial activit higher levels of expertise, knowle and education become more crit for businesses to stay ahead competition. Retention of go workers becomes a cost-effect measure as few organizations afford the cost of recruiting a training replacement high-tech, hi priced workers.

Finally, a good reward system necessary to motivate employees perform at peak levels. A recent st by the National Science Foundat concluded that "The key to hav workers who are both satisfied : productive is motivation, that arousing and maintaining the wil work effectively having workers v are productive not because they coerced but because the : committed. Of all the factors wh help to create highly motivated/hig satisfied workers, the principal appears to be that effect performance be recognized a rewarded in whatever terms meaningful to the individual, be financial or psychological or bo (Harrington, *The Improvement Pro* 1987 p. 191).

For many business organizations, ability to attract, retain and motiv the requisite workforce depends the appropriate mix of extrinsic a intrinsic reward components.

EXTRINSIC VERSUS INTRINSIC REWARDS

In the agrarian and predominant manufacturing phases of c economy when craft and m. production technologies held sw organizations primarily want

"compliance" from their workers and bought it with money and other tangible benefits. These benefits in the form of extrinsic items do not come from the work itself but are doled out by the organization to ensure that work is done properly and that rules are followed. They include things like take-home pay, bonuses, commissions, housing allowances and cash awards (Thomas, *Intrinsic Motivation at Work* 2000, p. 6). Such rewards were an easy vehicle to achieving work performance in the so-called compliance era. Because of the menial and repetitive nature of labor, business organizations were not overly interested in worker commitment or initiative. Consequently, little attention was given to workers' off-the-job personal interest or passion, and less to their future professional or vocational development. In eras where work was simplified, repetitive, and largely manual or performed with rudimentary tools or machinery, and low levels of education and skills were adequate for performance, extrinsic rewards were all that were necessary to induce compliance.

In today's workplace, motivational issues are more complex and demand more intrinsic value overtones. With the perceptible disappearance of many rudimentary jobs that were prevalent only a few decades ago and the rapid ascendancy of jobs that use high technology and require higher levels of skills and education, the switch to more autonomous and self-managed workforce is taking place. Close supervision and detailed rules are no longer the norm and, in many instances, constitute an irritant to workers. Along with this individualistic workplace have come challenges. Today's businesses, with fewer managers and workers, in the wake of the era of massive downsizing, can no longer afford to guarantee lifetime employment and super attractive pensions that were once the basis of careers in exchange for worker loyalty. Employees with dull jobs are less

willing to grit their teeth and hang on (Thomas p.8). Workers have developed a tendency to take more responsibility for their own careers, going where the work is truly rewarding and where there are opportunities to develop skills and acquire further education that can guarantee continued employment in their chosen fields. For the typical organization, competition for skilled workers has become a daunting exercise. A recent report by McKinsey and Company concludes that "successful companies win the talent war by applying many ideas...building trust and loyalty, having visionary leaders, offering enriched jobs, financially rewarding performance" (E.G. Chambers et al., "The War for Talent," *McKinsey Quarterly*, Issue 3, 1998 pp. 44-57). This war for talent includes not only bringing talent in but also keeping them. "At 5 P.M., 95% of our assets walk out the door," says an executive at SAS Institute, a leading statistics software firm. "We have to have an environment that makes them want to walk back in the door the next morning" (S.M. Jacoby, "Most Workers Find a Sense of Security in Corporate Life," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1998, p. B5.). More than fifty percent of 500 companies in a recent worldwide survey reported that retention of talented employees is their primary human resources challenge, particularly in the information technology and nursing fields where turnover rates are predicted to rise to record levels (K. Dobbs, *Workforce* 80, April 2001, pp.56-60). Researchers in organizational behavior have identified low job satisfaction as one of the primary causes of high turnover rate. They suggest that while job dissatisfaction builds up over a period of time, some specific "shock events" such as a boss's unfair decision or conflict with a co-worker is usually the immediate trigger that pushes an employee in the search for alternative employment that results in eventual separation (Mitchell et al, *Academy of Management Executive* 15 Nov. 2001, pp.96-

108). Redesigning compensation packages to include more of the values relevant to the current workforce is suggested as one corrective measure.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH TRADITIONAL REWARD SCHEMES



Simply stated, a reward system embodies any process within an organization that encourages, reinforces or compensates people for taking a particular set of actions. It may be formal or informal, cash or non-cash, immediate or delayed (Wilson, p. 16). Base pay, merit pay, bonuses, promotions and employee recognition are a few of the traditional reward schemes that seem to have lost their luster as inducements for joining or staying with an organization or for high performance once hired.

Base pay, the stable regular cash income that people receive for work, is the most visible traditional incentive for attracting employees to an organization. A true extrinsic reward, it has become a major source of household support. "The lifestyles of the great majority of workers revolve around their paychecks. The after-tax amount on the paycheck determines the kind and quantity of food, clothing, housing and transportation a worker can afford. Leisure activities are in many ways restricted or defined by the paycheck." (Henderson, 2003, p. 29). Base pay is also becoming a flexible cost-containment tool for businesses. When firms need to reduce cost, they cut head count in order to meet payroll expenses. The heightened sense of insecurity arising from this type of manipulation coupled with the extrinsic nature of base pay has eroded the power and influence of base pay relative to knowledge-based workers.

Merit pay, another traditional reward staple, is used to reflect an individual's

performance within an organization. Originally the notion was simple those who perform better receive higher pay increases than those with an average or below-average performances. A lot of the management literature in the 1980's and earlier work touted the value of merit pay (Heneman, 1992). Furthermore, there's ample evidence that when linked directly to performance, merit pay can still be an effective reward tool. In a recent literature review, 40 of 42 studies looking at merit pay report that performance increased when pay was tied to performance (Heneman, 2002).

percent increase ...and compares himself with the average performer who coasts to a 4 percent increase. First, we take out taxes on that extra 2 percent. Then we spread the raise out over 52 paychecks. It's only a slight exaggeration to suggest that the extra money won't pay for a good cup of coffee. Unless we make the reward difference larger for every increment in performance, many employees are going to say "Why bother?" (Milkovich and Newman, 2005 p. 288)

become another tool to prevent unwanted turnover particularly in managerial ranks. Far from being truly performance-based incentives these bonuses have become entitlements that managers have grown to expect and plan for in their personal budgets.

Upward career mobility has been an effective way of recognizing and rewarding high performers by promoting them into jobs with more responsibilities and challenges. Unfortunately, with downsizing and the "delaying" of levels

Table 1 Suggested Components of a Reward System

1. Compensation	Wages, commissions, and bonuses
2. Benefits	Vacations, health insurance
3. Social interaction	Friendly workplace
4. Security	Stable, consistent position and rewards
5. Status/recognition	Respect, prominence due to work
6. Work variety	Opportunity to experience different things
7. Workload	Right amount of work (not too much or too little)
8. Work importance	Is work valued by society
9. Authority/control/autonomy	Ability to influence others; control own destiny
10. Advancement	Chance to get ahead
11. Feedback	Receive information to improve performance
12. Work conditions	Hazard free
13. Development Opportunity	Training to learn new knowledge, skills/abilities

Source: Milkovich and Newman, *Compensation*, 2005, p. 267.

Unfortunately, merit pay has come under increasing attack for various good reasons. First, from management perspective, it is expensive and does not truly achieve the goal of improving employee and corporate performance (Day et al 2002). Second, the accuracy of performance ratings on which merit pay is based, leaves much to be desired. Finally, businesses do not allocate enough money to the merit pay system to truly reward the stellar performers and sufficiently differentiate across performance levels. (Eskew and Heneman, 2002). Milkovich and Newman illustrate the latter point as follows:

Consider the employee who works hard all year, earns a 6

Consequently, cost constraints have made it more difficult for many businesses to sufficiently reward the few super performers without denying pay increases to a large number of other workers. Furthermore, a large number of workers now expect merit pay in the same way as base pay, thus turning what was supposed to be a "motivator" into a "hygiene factor."

Bonuses, another traditional item, were originally tied to performance. High performers were rewarded with lump-sum payments in recognition of overall company financial performance and achievement of objectives. Today, bonuses have

management, many organizations have become flatter with fewer promotion opportunities. Finally, employee recognition programs continue to be used in many organizations; however, their popularity in recent years has been declining for several reasons. For example, with employee-of-the-month programs which recognize top performers, many employees do not know what they have to do to win an award either because the selection criteria are too vague or the decision process is too subjective. Therefore, a reward scheme that is intended to motivate workers is actually accomplishing the opposite.

MAKING A REWARD SYSTEM WORK



In view of the deficiencies noted, and the increasing transformation of the workforce to a more diversified and technological profile, organizations are challenged to reformulate their pay structures to a healthy mixture of extrinsic and intrinsic systems in order to achieve superior results. For effectiveness, research suggests that current reward systems should include certain key characteristics: specificity, meaningfulness, achievability, reliability, timeliness, equity and personal relevance (Kreitner, 2005 pp. 307-312). Table 1 below lists examples of reward components which can be manipulated to satisfy workers and encourage their behavior toward desired organizational performance goals.

Reward systems must be specific in that performance measures and feedback need to define what people should do to contribute to the organization's success. Vague or entirely subjective measures cannot provide the essential data elements necessary to motivate today's workforce. A clear line-of-sight must be established between the desired results and the required actions necessary to facilitate the accomplishment of these results.

Meaningful rewards take into consideration a worker's point of view in terms of reward valence. For meaningfulness, it has been suggested that the true leverage point for bonuses and similar benefits is 3%-5% of base pay. Other researchers put the mark at between 10%-20%. Regardless of size, fringe benefits need to be personalized to motivate today's workforce (Wilson, p. 49).

Performance goals, the primary drivers in reward schemes, should be tough but achievable to motivate. The

desired actions or results must be within a worker's control and attainable through reasonable efforts. If goals are too difficult, people are less likely to achieve them, and the resulting frustration usually leads to a process of reducing the desired behavior to the point of extinction. Rewards must have integrity and reliability that is, rewards should be contingent on the achievement of desired results. When the performance-reward linkage is ignored, a reward system has simply been converted to an entitlement.

Equity is another vital component in reward programs. Not only are workers concerned with the size of their own rewards but will also compare them with what relevant others receive, and will adjust their behavior to adjust for any perceived inequities. A credible reward system should treat all employees fairly without regard to gender, race, creed, national origin or any factors that are not part of the actual job performance criteria already established.

Finally, timeliness is perhaps the most crucial element of an effective reward system. Feedback, reinforcement and rewards need to be provided as soon after the achievement as possible. If workers could visualize a clear relationship between their efforts and the timing of rewards, they would more likely avoid the end-of-performance-period dash which characterizes many MBO reward programs.

Successful reward systems do not simply rely on money alone. By understanding what reinforcements are meaningful to employees and providing opportunities for them to earn them, management can create win/win scenarios. By personalizing rewards, organizations can anchor the rewards more deeply than if the rewards are treated as mere mechanical administrative tasks.

THE DIVERSIFIED WORKFORCE

The modern workforce is fast becoming a microcosm of the world population. Not too long ago small-town businesses were run by local residents consisting primarily of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant males (WASP). Today, with the advent of expatriate employees, host-country and third-country nationals, the make-up of the typical workforce is undergoing a radical transformation. Minority groups, previously underrepresented in managerial and leadership positions, are becoming a significant part of the workforce. Organizations must be willing and able to accommodate different cultural dynamics to remain competitive and successful. Mismanagement of unfamiliar cultural dimensions can be cause for misunderstanding and often the source of dysfunctional conflict (Gibson et al, 2000, p. 54). Religion, time orientation, and language are primary examples of cultural dimensions that can be managed for organizational success.

Religion plays a significant role in world cultures. At work, some employees organize prayer groups during breaks and lunch. Other cultures like the Muslims are required to pray five times per day in the direction of Mecca. It may be in the interest of an organization to work out a reasonable religious accommodation of a productive and valued high-tech Muslim work group than risking a costly turnover and, perhaps, a lawsuit. Time orientation refers to our perception of time and how we relate it to business and personal endeavors. Americans, for example, are viewed as impatient and time conscious, counting the hours in a day and adjusting schedules to try and use every minute. Eastern cultures view time as an inexhaustible resource that is to be treasured and not rushed. Insensitivity to these differences can result in a clash of cultures to the detriment of the organization,

particularly in relation to business appointments or negotiations.

Finally, language has been a source of barriers to global transactions. With over 3,000 world languages, it is easy to understand how problems can arise. Translations and interpretations can create unintended business and personal consequences. Chevrolet's Nova introduced in the 1970's sold very well in the United States. However, sales in the Hispanic regions of the world were abysmal. The reason: "no va", in Spanish translates into "no go" (Joinson 1995). George Kauss, president of a firm doing business in Mexico, noted that "the ugly American syndrome is alive and well in Mexico. Americans come to Mexico and wonder why everyone does not speak English" (Joinson *ibid*). To expect instant understanding and compliance on the part of other cultures in a globally competitive environment can contribute to failure. Empathy, sensitivity and equitable rewards are important elements in the management of the culturally diverse workplace. Culturally diversified rewards must also take into account some subtle nuances peculiar to each cultural group. People brought up in Asian cultures, for instance, may be

timing of such praise should be selected and arranged carefully consistent with the personal and cultural dictates of such workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A REWARD PACKAGE



As noted earlier, reward systems must be varied and creative to accommodate the needs of the individual while seeking to enhance the performance of the organization. The trend toward flatter structures with fewer opportunities for promotions, suggests that organizations must be able to identify alternative reward programs that appeal to different people or groups. As organizations extend their global reach and high-tech skills continue to carry premium price tags, compensation becomes a potent tool in attracting and retaining talent and in motivating them to develop skills needed to perform well (Rynes, et al 2002, pp. 92-103). Useful research findings abound for practitioners in designing reward packages that can address not only cultural differences but also personal preferences. Table 2 below summarizes some personality characteristics and their reward preferences.

represent reward schemes which organizations can use in various combinations to attract and retain high-tech and culturally diverse workforces: gain sharing, skill-based pay, banking time off, and cafeteria style benefits.

Gain-sharing, though not a new concept can have a significant appeal to high-skilled workers. Unlike profit sharing plan that is based on overall corporate profitability, gain-sharing plans recognize and reward unit or individual contributions that exceed unit profit targets. Thus, high performing units are not penalized by deficiencies of low-performing ones. If an area or unit can show cost saving or profit above the target for the period, the workers in that unit receive a percentage of the gains in the form of cash or other incentives. It is a powerful way to get workers to take pride of ownership in their respective units.

Skill-based pay is a relatively novel idea for organizations that intend to reduce hierarchical stovepipes in favor of leaner, flatter structures. Increments in wages flow from acquisition of relevant and useable skills by employees. The end result is

Table 2 Personality Characteristics and Reward Preferences

Person Characteristics	Preferred Reward Characteristics
Materialistic	Relatively more concerned about pay level
Low self-esteem	Want large, decentralized organization with little pay for performance
Risk takers	Want more pay based on performance
Risk averse	Want less performance-based pay
Individualists	Wants pay plans based on individual
("I control my destiny")	Performance, not group performance

Source: Milkovich and Newman, 2005 p. 272.

embarrassed and uncomfortable with public praise. They are taught deference, humility and selfless modesty. This does not imply that such workers should not be praised or recognized, but that the medium and

Compensation components can be configured in a variety of ways to fit the needs of unique work groups. Although not all inclusive, the following, from a synthesis of research findings,

highly trained, multi-faceted workforce capable of cross-training into several jobs. Although employee might eventually "top-out in terms of skills and pay, this is an ideal solution for organizations where there

are limited opportunities for advancements.

Banking time off can be a creative way for organizations to reward employees especially when fiscal reserves are not adequate to ensure equitable cash rewards. For some, time off is preferred because it is not taxed in the same manner as cash rewards.

Finally, cafeteria-style programs are designed to motivate employees by allowing them to set up their own fringe benefits package within discretionary bounds of options. In addition to making benefits personally relevant to the workers, cafeteria-style benefits engender a deep sense of participation and intrinsic satisfaction that comes from such participation on the part of the employee.

Successful non-traditional reward programs do not have to be expensive as exemplified by TRW Corporation, a leader in cafeteria-style benefits with its 12,000 employees (Gibson et al, p.188). At the heart of most non-traditional reward systems is the notion that everyone can win.

Traditional reward systems that pit one team or employee against another have become detrimental to the welfare of organizations and employees. New systems must be envisioned to give everyone a chance to share in the success of a company in keeping with the changing demography of the workplace.

CONCLUSION

Reward systems date back to the dawn of our wage economy, and its role as a lightning rod for social and moral debates has been well documented. Businesses are faced with a myriad of challenges: shortage of skilled workers, globalization, outsourcing, high technology and cultural diversity, to name a few. Organizations must adapt and adjust to these changes. Economic incentives, once established with good intentions, are transforming into entitlements (Nelson, 1996). As organizations and their diversified workforces mature into the high-tech world of today, reward systems must be redesigned to attract, retain and motivate employees to meet global challenges and competitive pressures.

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